

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Last week was quiet, unless you were a member of the Appropriations Committee. They were busy reviewing the Governor's Budget Recommendation, interviewing agency heads, and doing research for the mid-year adjustment, and the 2006/2007 budget.

This gives me a chance to survey a slew of new items submitted during the first week. I'll try to pick out the more interesting ones, and explain their proposals; there are many more than can be covered, with most of those being on dull subjects.

Eminent domain is truly a sparking hot topic. No fewer than seven bills were introduced on the subject (not counting the Senate). Most represent different ideas about what Public Purpose should be defined as, but one of them (HB 960), takes the approach of calling for a temporary moratorium on use of eminent domain for urban re-development. I've learned that, with so many ideas floating around, the Judiciary Committee plans to draft their own bill, which will focus on keeping the definition of Public Purpose within the most commonly understood limits.

HB 969, part of the Governor's agenda, intended to implement his plan to guarantee that no less than 65% of education funding is used in classrooms. This seems like a clear cut goal on the surface: in reality, there is a lot of fog about what aspects of instructional activity are to be defined as "classroom", and which are not. I expect lots of good debate on this.

HR 1045 would add a referendum in November, by which we could require that lottery funds are only for the HOPE Scholarship or pre-kindergarten. This is also on the Governor's agenda.

HB 941 would allow courthouses to post several documents that show the influence of religion on the founding and evolution of the federal government. The documents are the Mayflower Compact of 1620; the Ten Commandments; and Declaration of Independence. This approach has survived court challenges in other states, and the authors hope to bring this option here.

HB 950 is intended to protect public school students or public employees who wish to make personal, verbal comments to others in celebration or observance of any public or legal holiday (this includes Christmas Day). The bill specifies that no state or local government may adopt a policy placing any restriction on such person-to-person remarks.

HB 973 would disallow the issuance of speeding tickets within a certain distance beyond where a reduced speed limit sign is posted, and also for 30 days after a speed limit has lowered. I suspect this is meant to cut down on "speed traps".

HB 985 is a response to problems that occurred when the State Health plan switched to United Health Care as its plan administrator last year. The bill would require that the administrator must enter into a contract with any health care provider who agrees to the State's fee schedule. Having had to push United to work with Newton Medical Center, and some area physicians, I think this is a very good idea.

Finally, HR 1038 would add a referendum to November's ballot asking if we want to extend the term of office for state representatives and senators to four years. The first election for such terms would be 2008. There are many pros and cons to such a change. I feel I should vote the will of the district on such a clear cut issue, so I invite any resident of the district to email me at the address below with a "yes" or "no" on HR 1038. Please include your name and address, because I will only count bona fide residents of district 112.

For reference: bills and live session and committee video are online at www.legis.state.ga.us. Contact Info: My office phone is 404-656-0152, and email address is Doug@DougHolt.org.